Farmers alter harvest schedule to save rare birds

By Mark Grossi, Fresno Bee

Shortly before harvest this spring, thousands of rare birds suddenly flocked to a Tulare County wheat field and nested – setting the stage for a vast killing field with baby birds.

But the dairy farmer who was growing the wheat as feed for his cows delayed long enough to save thousands of tricolored blackbirds, averting a wildlife disaster.

He was one of four dairy farmers in the San Joaquin Valley who held off harvests this year to protect more than 20 percent of the tricolored blackbird's global population. The federal government spent $100,000 helping the farmers replace the feed.

It's a success story that seems as rare as the tricolored blackbird. In an era when regulation and lawsuits drive environmental reform, this voluntary collaboration saves birds, keeps dairy farms in business and leaves out lawyers.

"Dairy farmers see this as a win-win," said Michael Marsh, chief executive officer of Western United Dairymen, a Modesto-based industry group representing 900 dairies.

Western United works with Audubon California and government agencies to save the remaining blackbirds, which once numbered in the millions. There are 260,000 left in the world, and more than 95 percent of them are in California.

For dairy owners, the partnership makes sense because it is a major influence in keeping the bird off the protection list for the federal Endangered Species Act, which can be stifling to business and industry.

But nature also plays a part. The tricolored birds gather in huge breeding colonies – they are the most colonial birds in North America. It's not unusual to see 30,000 in a single farm field.

Decades ago, they nested in the coastal wetlands and inland marshes of Central California. But their historic breeding grounds have disappeared as development and farming spread during the last century.

The birds still nest wherever they can find freshwater marshes among the cattails in the Valley. But the blackbirds will readily settle for alfalfa, hay and wheat fields where they can easily fill their dietary needs.

Read the whole story

Report: Child poverty increasing in United States

By Saki Knafo, Huffington Post

The "Kids Count" report, one of the most widely cited surveys of how children are faring in the United States, hasn't offered much good news in recent years, and this year's edition offered few surprises.

Drawing mostly on U.S. Census data, the report noted that the percentage of children living in poverty increased by nearly a third between 2000 and 2010, and that it rose 16 percent between 2005 and 2010. The rate of children whose parents lack secure employment rose by 22 percent in the period roughly coinciding with the first two years of the global recession,

beginning in 2008, the report said.

The annual report is published by the Annie E. Casey Foundation, one of the largest private charitable organizations in the U.S. devoted to improving the lives of children.

As of 2010, according to the report, 1 out of 11 teens was neither in school nor working, and 4 out of 10 children were living in households where the cost of housing was high. The latest number of kids living in high-poverty neighborhoods had increased by 22 percent, compared with 2005.

By other measures, things didn't look quite so bad. The number of high school students graduating on time has increased, as have reading and math scores across the country – though not by much. There were more children attending preschool in 2010 than in 2005, and there's been a significant improvement in the number of children who have health insurance, a change that the foundation attributes to expansions of Medicaid and the State Children's Health Improvement Program. (The Children's Health Insurance Reauthorization Act of 2009, signed by President Barack Obama, added an additional 4 million children and pregnant women to the program's rolls.)

Read the whole story

Genoa's Sweet Sippin' Sundays benefits Austin's House

Genoa's Sweet Sippin' Sundays continues Aug. 5 from 1-4pm. The theme for August is rum cocktails and proceeds will benefit Austin's House.

The cost is $10 for a keepsake glass handcrafted in Genoa and a passport to sample a sweet and a tasty rum drink at each participating business. There will also be live music and raffle prizes.

The Greater Genoa Business Association is the host for Sweet Sippin' Sundays. Businesses participating in the event are Trimmer's Outpost, Genoa Bar, Genoa Trading Company, Historic Genoa Ghost Tours, Genoa Country Inn, David Walley's, Orchard House, Genoa Floral Creations, Silverheels Boutique, Tombstone Tap and Grill, Genoa Country Store, Dancing Deer, Sweet Repeats, Genoa Station Bar & Grille, Rustic Romance and Buono Sera. Sweet Sippin' Sundays are the first Sunday of each month through October.

Call (775) 309.3133 for more information.

Austin's House is the only emergency children's shelter in rural Northern Nevada.

Olympic athletes need to gorge to get enough calories

By Gretchen Reynolds, New York Times

Endurance athletes, unlike the rest of us, have the unusual problem of having to work hard to keep weight on. "In your super-high-calorie-burning sports, like distance running, cycling or the triathlon, elite athletes can burn 15 or 20 calories a minute," says Michael Joyner, a researcher at the Mayo Clinic in Rochester, Minn., who conducts studies of

endurance athletes. At the peak of training, these athletes are working out four or five hours a day, he continues.

These workouts can burn 4,000 to 6,000 calories, which “have to be replenished,” he continues, “if you want to train again the next day.” Refueling can resemble an episode of “Man v. Food,” with dinner consisting of things like a pound of pasta drizzled with olive oil (about 800 calories), a dozen eggs (840 calories), an entire cheese pizza (perhaps 2,000 calories) and a pint of Ben & Jerry’s cheesecake-brownie ice cream (1,000 calories). These foods (although not this exact lineup) were described to me by dietitians and officials who work with Olympians as common training-table choices for elite endurance athletes, particularly men. Plus beer (about 150 calories a bottle).

One of the biggest issues, they told me, is that these athletes, in their quest for fuel, often turn to high-calorie but less nutritious processed foods — Snickers bars, store-bought chocolate-chip cookies, Pop-Tarts. Even an athlete who intends to eat healthfully can be defeated by nutritional realities. “You can only eat so much oatmeal and tofu,” Joyner says. A typical bowl of oatmeal contains about 150 calories, a cup of tofu about 175. You do the math.

“Dietary fat provides nine calories per gram, whereas carbs provide about four per gram,” says Kerry Stewart, an exercise physiologist and a professor of medicine at Johns Hopkins University, meaning that fat is “energy dense” and desirable for famished athletes — but less so if you want to shed pounds. And even on a pizza-and-ice-cream diet, some athletes drop weight during peak training periods.

Read the whole story

Meteorologists on the scene helping with forest fires

By Julian Granka, Sacramento Bee

National Weather Service meteorologist Mike Smith sits at a desk most of the year. In wildfire season, however, he takes on a new persona: He wears a fire suit and camps out for days at a time at ground zero of major forest fires.

Smith spent a week and a half this month as the resident meteorologist at the Mill fire in the Mendocino National Forest – the 55th fire where he was the meteorologist on scene.

“I got here the day after it burned 10,000 acres,” he said while he was finishing up his work there.

Smith and the weather experts like him are the “incident meteorologists” who inform firefighters of every nuance of the weather – from heat and humidity to changing gusts of wind. They make those calls from their tents and makeshift offices in the camps where fire crews refer to them as an “IMET.”

Such on-scene weather experts are essential to building strategies to fight major wildfires. Using an IMET’s information, fire chiefs determine the most effective and safe ways to contain raging fires.

“You belong to them,” Smith said. “For any incident, any fire, you’re the weather support for that particular site.”

Julie Hutchinson, a California Department of Forestry and Fire Protection battalion chief, explained the need for detailed information about past, current and future weather. “We can go in and remove vegetation, remove grass, brush, and timber … but the one thing we have zero control over is the weather,”

she said.

So that the fire crews know what to expect, an IMET briefs them each morning before they head to the fire.

“They’re writing the forecast for the shift package that the crew carries in their back pocket,” said veteran IMET John Snook. As predictive services manager for the interagency Northern California Geographic Area Coordination Center, Snook now provides long-term decision-making support regarding wildfires.

During their 15-to-16-hour days, IMETs also provide constant weather guidance and outlooks for the coming days.

By getting out of the office, an IMET “can stand under a fir tree” and take local measurements of temperature, humidity and wind, said Snook. For a firsthand look, an IMET often gets even closer to the fire, doing the same assessments with the firefighters on the line.

Read the whole story

Canadians told they must have grass, not a garden

By CBC News

A couple is fighting to keep a vegetable garden they grow on their property in Drummondville, which is northeast of Montreal.

This spring, Michel Beauchamp and his wife, Josée Landry, planted an elaborate vegetable garden on the front lawn of

their Richelieu Street home.

They used to have flowers growing, but Beauchamp has high blood pressure and wanted to eat healthier. So they planted cucumbers, tomatoes, zucchinis, beets, onions, and brussels sprouts, among other vegetables.

Landry said the garden has had a big impact on her and her husband's health. "Michel lost 75 pounds since March, I lost 25 pounds," she said.

But the couple will face fines if they don't rip up part of their garden in the next five days.

According to a spokesperson for Drummondville, front lawns in the couple's St-Charles-de-Drummond neighbourhood must be 30 percent grass.

Read the whole story

El Dorado County woman hospitalized after accident on Rubicon Trail

By Ed Fletcher, Sacramento Bee

An El Dorado Hills woman remained in critical condition Monday after her vehicle rolled off the Rubicon Trail, causing a 2-acre forest fire and stranding as many as 300 other Jeeps participating in the Jeepers Jamboree.

Rachel Anne Gray, 21, was part of a large caravan of off-road enthusiasts driving north on an El Dorado County road early

Saturday evening when the 1961 Jeep Willy she was driving careened off an embankment near Cadillac Hill, said Officer Dan Stark, a spokesman for the California Highway Patrol.

The vehicle overturned several times, ejecting Gray and a 34-year-old male passenger from Pilot Hill before catching fire, Stark said. Both Gray and the passenger were transported to the UC Davis Medical Center in Sacramento, he said.

A hospital spokeswoman confirmed Gray's condition early Monday afternoon. The passenger suffered minor injuries.

By early Monday morning, the fire was contained and the rugged, rocky road reopened.

Lacey Stiles, an employee of the Georgetown-based event, said the trail was reopened at 7am thanks to the U.S. Forest Service, which is battling the fire.

While some of the Jeeps turned back, most – lacking enough fuel for the return trip – waited out the fire before completing the final three to four hours of the trip toward Lake Tahoe.

Neighborhood bear killed on Homewood beach

By KRNV-TV

HOMEWOOD- – A Placer County sheriff's deputy says a bear was found shot and killed on a beach in the Homewood area Sunday night.

The deputy told News 4 the investigation is now in the hands

of the California Department of Fish and Game.

According to Placer County authorities, a person can obtain a permit to shoot and kill a bear. A permit can only be issued if there is a reason; if a bear is a problem bear or has done damage to property. If there was no permit, Placer County authorities say this would be considered illegal.

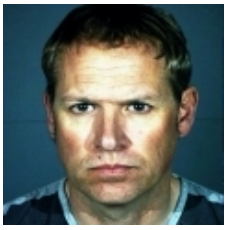
According to bear advocates, this bear has been in the area for years. They says the bear's name was Sunny and it was a mascot for the BEAR League, a bear advocacy group in the Lake Tahoe area.

5-year prison sentence for former El Dorado County sergeant

By Cathy Locke, Sacramento Bee

The former president of the El Dorado County Deputy Sheriff's Association has been sentenced to five years in state prison for embezzling more than $300,000 over six years from the association.

Attorney General Kamala D. Harris and El Dorado County District Attorney Vern Pierson announced the sentencing of Donald Philip Atkinson, a retired El Dorado County sheriff's sergeant. Atkinson pleaded no contest last month and was sentenced today in El Dorado Superior Court on three felony counts of embezzlement, elder fraud and perjury.



Don
Atkinson

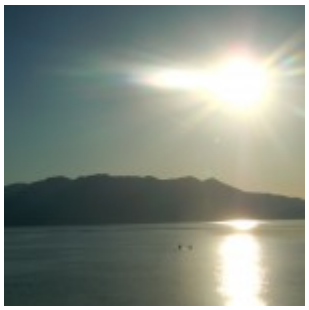
He was ordered by the court to pay more than $400,000 in restitution. While in state prison and on parole, Atkinson has agreed to pay $1,000 per month from his retirement fund to the victims.

Authorities said Atkinson opened bank accounts in his name and submitted forged documents to the Deputy Sheriff’s Association to justify payments made to him and his companies. Much of the money was obtained through ATM withdrawals and checks payable to Atkinson, which made his actions difficult for auditors to trace, according to an Attorney General’s Office news release.

The case was investigated by the El Dorado County District Attorney’s Office with support from the Attorney General’s Office. The investigation showed that Atkinson falsified Fair Political Practice Commission forms and submitted forged documents to the Deputy Sheriff’s Association.

Read the whole story

Snippets about Lake Tahoe



• Lake Tahoe was recently ranked the Best Lake in America in a survey by *USA Today*.

• Sept. 13 from 5:30-8pm is the Signature Cocktail Contest at Riva Grill. Proceeds benefit Barton Health Foundation's Festival of Trees and Lights.

• Charter Communications has moved to 183 Highway 50, Ste. A in Round Hill.

• Lake Tahoe Wildlife Care's open house is Aug. 5 from 10am-4pm.

• Truckee's home tour benefiting Excellence in Education is Aug. 5 from 10am-4pm. Tickets are $40 in advance and $45 the day of event – (530) 550.7984.